

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 132903

FOL TEGUCIGALPA 2440 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO SAN SALVADOR
SAN JOSE GUATEMALA MANAGUA MAY 23, 1978 REPEATED TO YOU QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 2440

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PING, SHUM, SNAR, MASS, MORG, MPOL, XK, HO

SUBJ: CONVERSATION WITH THE CHIEF OF STATE: ARMS ACQUISITIONS
AND POLICE BRUTALITY

REF: STATE 122854

1. ACCOMPANIED BY THE DCM, I CALLED ON CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR
MAY 22, AND AT THE END OF OUR CONVERSATION ON OTHER MATTERS, I
TOLD HIM I HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO RAISE TWO ADDITIONAL ISSUES:
ARAMENTS PURCHASES, AND POLICE BRUTALITY. RECALLING THAT WE
HAD DISCUSSED THE LATTER IN A PREVIOUS CONVERSATION ON HUMAN
RIGHTS, I MENTIONED SPECIFICALLY CASE OF MAJOR BARAHONA'S PUB-
LIC ADMISSION THAT HE HAD SEVERELY BEATEN UP COLOMBIAN SUBJECT

CHARGED WITH NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING. I SAID BARAHONA'S STATEMENT
HAD BEEN REPORTED, AND HAD UNDERSTANDABLY CAUSED INTEREST
IN THE US AND OTHER COUNTRIES, PARTICULARLY BECAUSE HONDURAS
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HAS HAD SUCH A GOOD HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD.

2. MELGAR RESPONDED THAT THE CASE OF MAJOR BARAHONA WAS INDEED
UNFORTUNATE, INVOLVING NOT ONLY POLICE BRUTALITY BUT ACCEPTANCE
OF A BRIBE. HE SAID THE GOVERNMENT NOT ONLY DOES NOT CONDONE
BARAHONA'S ACTIONS, IT CONDEMNS THEM. HIS ACTIONS WERE THOSE OF
AN INDIVIDUAL, NOT OF THE GOVERNMENT. MELGAR SAID THAT HE, PER-

SONALLY, IS UNABLE TO UNDERSTAND THE MENTALITY THAT RESULTS IN SUCH BEHAVIOR. HE RECALLED THAT HE HAD, IN EFFECT, BEEN IN CHARGE OF THE NATIONAL POLICE (FUSEP) WHEN HE HAD BEEN MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT UNDER THE LOPEZ ARELLANO REGIME, AND THAT HE HAD RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE HELP AND ASSISTANCE FROM THE US. HE ASKED IF THERE IS SOME WAY SELECTED POLICE OFFICIALS CAN BE SENT TO THE US FOR TRAINING.

3. TURNING TO THE ISSUE OF ARMS PURCHASES, I RECALLED MELGAR'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CARTER IN WASHINGTON LAST SEPTEMBER, AND REITERATED THE US INTEREST, AS EXPRESSED BY PRESIDENT CARTER, IN AN EARLY AND AMICABLE SOLUTION TO THE HONDURAN/EL SALVADOR BORDER DISPUTE. I SAID THAT WE HOPE THAT NOTHING BE DONE TO HINDER THE SPIRIT OF THE EL POY MEETING BETWEEN MELGAR AND THE PRESIDENT OF EL SALVADOR, OR TO RETARD THE CURRENT MEDIATION EFFORTS. MELGAR SAID THERE ARE MANY RUMORS THAT HONDURAS PLANS ADDITIONAL ARMS ACQUISITIONS, AND THAT HE HAS EVEN BEEN QUESTIONED ABOUT THIS BY THE MINISTER OF FINANCE. ONE OF THE PROBLEMS IS THAT OTHER COUNTRIES HAVE BEEN OFFERING ARMS SALES, ON VERY FAVORABLE TERMS. HE DISCLOSED THAT PERU HAD RECENTLY BEEN VERY PERSISTENT IN SEEKING TO SELL AIRCRAFT TO HONDURAS ON TERMS SO ATTRACTIVE THAT IT WAS DIFFICULT TO REFUSE THEM.

4. MELGAR SAID THAT THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER IS THAT HONDURAS DOES NOT CONTEMPLATE ANY NEW MAJOR ARMS ACQUISITIONS BECAUSE IT CANNOT AFFORD TO DIVERT FUNDS NEEDED FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.
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MENT. BUT HONDURAS DOES WANT TO BUY SMALL SHIPS FROM THE US TO PATROL ITS COAST, AS A DEFENSIVE MEASURE. ADDRESSING HIMSELF TO EFFORTS TO RESOLVE THE BORDER PROBLEM, MELGAR SAID HE HAD BEEN VERY OPTIMISTIC SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, AND WAS CONFIDENT THAT AN AGREEMENT WOULD BE SIGNED IN LATE JUNE OR EARLY JULY. DESPITE THE CHANGE IN THE SALVADORAN POSITION, MELGAR SAID, THERE ARE STILL SOME ENCOURAGING SIGNS, BUT IT IS CLEAR THAT THE CHIEF OF STATE'S FORMER OPTIMISM HAS DISAPPEARED.

5. KEY MEMBERS OF THE COUNTRY TEAM AND I HAD RESERVATIONS CONCERNING THE INSTRUCTIONS CONTAINED IN STATE 122854, BECAUSE IT APPEARED TO US THAT WE WERE OVER-REACTING ON BOTH ISSUES. ALTHOUGH I DREW UPON MOST OF THE TALKING POINTS INCLUDED IN THE INSTRUCTION, I DELIBERATELY OMITTED ANY MENTION OF THE PURCHASES OF SUPER MYSTERE AIRCRAFT, AND MELGAR MADE NO REFERENCE TO THEM. IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT THE US GOVERNMENT HAS ACQUIESCED IN THE PREVIOUS ISRAELI SALES OF THESE AIRCRAFT TO HONDURAS, IT SEEMS TO ME WE ARE NOT IN A VERY STRONG POSITION TO CONDEMN THEM IN RETROSPECT. AS FAR AS SALES OF TWO ADDITIONAL SUPER MYSTERES ARE CONCERNED, WHICH THE US HAS ALREADY APPROVED, WE HAVE NO INFORMATION THAT THE GOH INTENDS TO CONCLUDE THESE PURCHASES IN THE NEAR FUTURE AND, JUDGING FROM MELGAR'S COMMENTS,

THE GOH MAY NOT NOW INTEND TO DO SO. JARAMILLO UNQUOTE
CHRISTOPHER

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